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ABSTRACT

Critical thinking in the fine arts is defined as a reasonable and reflective thinking that is focused on what to believe and to do in relation to the fine arts. It is a process designed to help students develop awareness, appreciation, and understanding as they think clearly and critically about the arts and learn to express their ideas in a logical and concise manner. Methods used to teach critical thinking in the fine arts are: (1) homework almost daily; (2) testing through essays, objective tests, and short-answer questions; (3) writing assignment; (4) critical thinking exercises; and (5) group problem-solving. Examples of assignments and test items are presented, along with writing standards for the different reviews and critiques required. (SLD)

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ED 379 308

TEACHING CRITICAL THINKING IN THE FINE ARTS

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14th ANNUAL

International Conference on Critical Thinking and Educational Reform

July 30 - August 3, 1994

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Critical thinking in the fine arts is reasonable and reflective thinking which is focused upon what to believe and do in relation to the fine arts. Critical thinking in the fine arts is a process which is designed to help students to:

1. Develop their awareness, appreciation, and understanding of the arts.

   Awareness: A person has an awareness of the arts when he or she can recognize the arts when they are seen and/or heard.

   Appreciation: A person has an appreciation of the arts when he or she has a positive attitude about the arts and their contribution to human life.

   Understanding: A person has an understanding of the arts when he or she can make value judgments about specific works of art.

2. Think clearly and critically about the arts. This includes the ability to

   - Clarify issues, conclusions, or beliefs.
   - Develop personal criteria for evaluating specific works of art.
   - Make judgments and draw logical conclusions about specific works of art.
   - Listen, look, and read for understanding and not merely for facts.
   - Note significant similarities and differences between works of art.
   - Recognize the limits of one's knowledge and to qualify one's answers both in writing and in discussion.

3. Express their ideas in a logical and concise manner in writing. This includes the ability to

   - Analyze a problem.
   - Write with clarity and accuracy (to spell, punctuate, and capitalize properly), and to use proper sentence structure.
   - Support statements made and conclusions drawn by using examples and/or evidence.
   - Have an organization which is logical and easily understood; generally a statement of the main idea, and the reasons, evidence, and/or examples which support the idea.

Methods of Teaching Critical Thinking in the Fine Arts

Five methods are used to teach critical thinking in the fine arts, with a minimum of lecture and a maximum of student involvement.

Homework

A written assignment over readings in the textbook is required almost daily. Some questions to be answered are for the purpose of establishing a knowledge base, while other questions require students to practice critical thinking as outlined above. Many homework questions require students to make inferences based upon reading assignments in the text and go beyond merely looking up single-word answers. Homework is discussed in groups of two and by the class as a whole.

Testing

Testing takes three forms. One is the preparation of essay questions that require students to cover the knowledge base and to give personal reflections on and insight into the material. The instructor tells the students which essay questions they are required to answer and how many are to be chosen to answer. Students are told they should prepare essay outlines as they read and progress through a unit. The instructor announces which essays are required and the number to be chosen by the student one class day before the papers are due, *e.g.* students are told on Wednesday that essays are due on Friday.

The second form of testing is a more traditional objective question approach over representative compositions and paintings studied in the class. Students answer questions while listening to musical examples and looking at slides.

The third form of testing is a short-answer question given at the beginning of a class period, the question having been assigned as homework. The question may cover content or require the student to make value judgements about the content studied.

Writing

Students are required to write a series of essays and to hand in written reviews of concerts, recitals, plays, and art galleries they have attended. Their writing must follow prescribed procedures, and assignments are evaluated according to established guidelines.

Critical Thinking Exercises

Materials are selected either from the textbook or from literature in the arts and used for typical critical thinking exercises, such as determining the main idea of a passage and the ways the idea is or is not supported by the writer.

Group Problem-Solving

Some class periods are started with a problem to be solved, the problem being based upon the reading which was required for homework. The problems are designed both to develop thinking skills and to help students connect with the relevance of the material.

For example: after reading about the 16th and 17th century intellectual climate which produced the Baroque and Classic eras, the class was asked: "How do you know that you are? How would you prove it? Why is the question important?" This was followed by discussion of how Baroque and Classic art forms reflected this intellectual ferment.

The students are divided into pairs, and questions are thought and talked about by pairs before class discussion.

The following are examples of problem-solving questions which can be used to start a class session or to stimulate thinking at some point in a class session. The categories conform to the course **Introduction to Fine Arts** taught by the writer. In every instance, students are expected to give reasons for their answers. When references are made to specific works of visual or musical art, students are expected to relate their answers to what they see and hear as well as what they have read about the works in the textbook.

1. While agreeing with Plato that the real world existed in heaven, Aristotle argued that the physical world can be known through careful observation. What consequences does this view have for the development of the arts? Why?

2. What is typical of all Greek sculpture? Are their traits which are not typical of all Greek sculpture? What are some examples that support your conclusions?

3. What did Protagoras mean by the statement, "Man is the measure of all things?" How was this view expressed in sculpture?

4. How does the Pantheon blend Greek style with Roman style? What is most Greek? What is most Roman? How do you support your conclusion(s)?

5. Is it possible to perceive either a presence or an absence of moral concern in architectural structures like the Colosseum and the Pantheon? Can architecture reflect moral values? Can architecture reflect any kind of values? Explain why you think so.

6. Read the story of David and Goliath in 1 Samuel 17. Then, study the photograph of Donatello's David (1425-30). To what extent is Donatello's sculpture faithful to the biblical story? What do you see or do not see in the sculpture which leads to your conclusions?

7. Study Masaccio's Holy Trinity and The Tribute Money. Are any of the figures in the paintings influenced by the sculptures of Donatello? What do you see that leads you to that conclusion?

8. Venus was the goddess in classical mythology who could seduce Zeus whenever she wished. Only three women divinities could resist her. She was a symbol of sexual pleasure. In his painting The Birth of Venus, how has Boticelli's interpretation kept this aspect of her "history" under control? What has he done visually to make the myth acceptable to Christians?

9. As you look at Botticelli's The Birth of Venus what tensions do you see between Venus's sexuality and Christian modesty and repression of sexual passion? Explain your answer.

10. In neo-Platonism Venus is an allegory of the gifts of God. All the figures in The Birth of Venus are mythical; none are human. How can a non-human allegory be interpreted as an example of humanism? What evidence do you have from your reading which leads to this conclusion?

11. As you listen to Dufay's Ave Maria, jot down answers to these questions for later discussion with your partner.

    a. Is the pacing regular, like dance music, with a beat and accents?
    b. Which voices are most prominent - male or female?
    c. What is the effect of hearing the melody passed back and forth from one voice group to another voice group?
    d. Does the music communicate a religious atmosphere? Why or why not? Give reasons for your answer.

12. Study Leonardo's Mona Lisa. Can you detect Leonardo's response to his sitter? Does he approve or disapprove of his subject? Is there warmth or a distant coolness toward her? Why do you think people are so fascinated by this painting? Support your answers by referring to what you see in the painting and to what you know about Leonardo.

13. The central panel of Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling represents the creation of Eve. Why does that panel play such an important role in the composition?

14. The panel below Eve shows the creation of Adam, and the panel above Eve shows the fall of Adam and Eve, with the serpent wound around the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Why did Michelangelo display these events so prominently?

15. Consider that while Michelangelo was constructing the tomb of Julius, the Laocoon group was discovered and brought to the Vatican for him to study. Do you think it is reasonable to suppose that Michelangelo competed directly with the ancient Greek and Roman sculptors in his portrayal of the nude? Can you detect influences of classical sculpture in the tomb of Julius? Why or why not?

16. Plato supposedly taught his pupils in an olive grove. However, in Raphael's The School of Athens the setting is totally different. Why did Raphael imagine such an imposing setting?

Examples of Assignments and Tests in the Fine Arts To Teach Critical Thinking

Essays

At the end of a unit the student should be able to write short essays on any topics which represent the essential content of the course. Each essay must include the student's thinking about the material as well as pertinent information learned. Any terms and names to know and use in the essay writing are included at the end of the list of essay topics. Following are some examples of essay topics.

1. The Romantic Era

   To be included in the essay: origins of Romanticism; characteristics of Romanticism in general; the social and cultural events which helped cause the romantic "back to nature" movement; examples to illustrate your conclusions.

   Your thoughts: to what extent was Romanticism a rebellion against Neoclassicism? why do you think so?

2. Romanticism in Visual Art

   To be included in the essay: characteristics of Romanticism in visual art; Romanticism in sculpture; a comparison of two representative paintings, noting their Romantic characteristics.

   Your thoughts: why do you think Goya is considered to be one of the first Romantic artists? why do you think so?

3. Romantic Architecture

   To be included in the essay: how architecture responded to the Romantic impulse; types and styles of architecture; at least one notable example of Romantic architecture.

   Your thoughts: to what extent was Romantic architecture practical for use in everyday life? why do you think so?

4. Music in the Romantic Era

   To be included in the essay: some of the ways composers wrote music differently in the Romantic period; why and how instrumental music became more important than previously; the Romantic elements in Berlioz' "Symphonie Fantastique."

   Your thoughts: music has been called "the most romantic of all the arts;" in what sense is this true? why do you think so?

5. Realism and Romanticism in Art

   To be included in the essay: what is "Realism" in art; how the Romantic and Realistic approaches to subject matter are different; how Courbet's "Burial at Ornans" is both an example of realism and a rejection of the standards associated with academic art.

   Your thoughts: what kind of contemporary art could be a rejection either of academic or ethical standards? give an example and tell why you think so.

Questions

Students are given objective and short-answer questions over paintings and composition. For recordings, they are expected to identify major composers, their works, and their historical period while listening to recorded examples. Representative composers and their works are selected from those on the unit listening tape. For example,

1. As you listen to the tape, answer the following questions using complete sentences.

   A. What is the tempo and the meter of the music?
   B. What is the texture of the music? How do you know?
   C. What is the source of te text and of the main melody?
   D. What is the length of the melodic material?
   E. What instruments and/or voices are performing the music?

2. You will hear one example of music from the Unit Tape. As you listen, answer these questions.

   A. Which families of instruments are you most aware of in the music?
   B. Of which are you most aware: melody, rhythm, or harmony? Why?
   C. Circle the terms which best describe the melody.

      prominent - not prominent
      long - short - moderate
      ornamented - simple
      repetitious - imitative - sequential

   D. Circle the terms which best describe some of the sounds you hear

      glissandos
      percussive sounds
      short, sharp sounds
      loud, sustained sounds
      soft, loud, or sudden sounds
      reverberating or echoing sounds

   E. How is the music emotionally expressive, and what mood is established?

On a test over slides, students are expected to identify true statements in multiple choice format about the styles of individual painters. For example, questions might cover the artists and their works selected from a representative list such as the following.

Bonheur, "The Horse Fait"
Constable, "The Hay Wain"
Courbet, "Burial at Ornans"
Delacroix,
"The Death of Sardanapalus"
"Liberty Leading the People"
Friedrich, "Wanderer Above the Mists"
Fuseli, "The Nightmare"
Gericault, "The Raft of the Medusa"
Goya, "Executions of the Third of May, 1808"
"Witches' Sabbath"
"The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters"
Ingres, "The Turkish Bath"
Manet: "Boulevard des Capucines, Paris"
Toulouse-Lautrec, "At the Moulin Rouge"
Turner, "Rain, Steam, and Speed"

Using a list as a basis, questions such as the following may asked. The titles of paintings and the names of painters are not included with the test question.

1. As you view this slide [*The Four Apostles* by Durer] answer the following questions using complete sentences.

   A. Is this painting Catholic or Protestant? How do you know?
   B. Is the painting a realistic portrayal? Why do you think so?
   C. What kind of balance and perspective did the artist use? Tell why you think so.
   D. How are line and color used?
   E. What is the purpose of this painting? Why do you think so?

2. This work [*Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* by Picasso] was inspired by

   A. African masks.
   B. Japanese prints.
   C. A French novel.
   D. Impressionism.

3. The name of the painter [when the painting is *The Persistence of Memory*] is

   A. Dali
   B. Chagall
   C. Duchamp
   D. de Chirico

4. The group [*German Expressionists*] to which this painter belongs was inspired by

   A. The subconscious mind.
   B. Primitive art.
   C. African masks.
   D. Machines.

5. This painting [*Guernica* by Picasso]documents the

   A. Triumph of expressionist technique.
   B. First saturation air raid of the twentieth century.
   C. Artist's devotion to his birthplace.
   D. Spanish custom of bull fighting.

6. This type of painting is an example of

   A. Action painting.
   B. Op art.
   C. Abstract Expressionism.
   D. Psychic automatism.

Assignments

Daily assignments include the pages to read in the textbook, material to read in the student course handbook prepared by the instructor, and specific questions which require the analysis of music and/or paintings such as these examples show.

1. Use the list of the characteristics of Romantic art in your Handbook to help you answer these questions about "The Death of Marat" by Jacques David.

   A. What is the subject matter of the painting ?
   B. Is the subject matter of the painting representational or abstract? How do you know?
   C. What is the balance of the painting? How do you know?
   D. Describe and then compare the shape and use of line in each painting.
   E. Describe the use of color.
   F. How intense is the emotional content of the painting?
   G. Name the elements which give you this expressive quality.
   H. What specific Romantic style traits do you see?
   I. Does "The Death of Marat" have as clear a political message as "The Oath of the Horatii?" Why do you think so?
   J. What is the effect of having such a plain background take up so much space?

2. Be prepared to answer this question in class: "What are the essential characteristics shared by the romantic heroes, both historical and fictional, discussed in your text?"

3. This piece is on the unit tape in the library. Listen to the piece, then answer these questions about "First Movement" from ***Symphony No. 6*** by Ludwig van Beethoven. Use the material from the Handbook, pages 13-16, to help you answer.

   A. Which families of instruments or voices are you most aware of in the music? Why?
   B. Of which are you most aware: melody, rhythm, or harmony? Why?
   C. Describe the dynamics of the music.
   D. How is the music organized in terms of meter and pulse?
   E. What is the tempo of the music?
   F. What kinds of sounds do you hear? What is making these sounds?
   G. How is the music emotionally expressive? What do you hear that arouses these emotions?
   H. What mood does the music create? What do you hear that creates this mood?
   I. Describe the melody.
   J. What are the expressive qualities in the music?
   K. What do you hear that tells you this is Romantic music?

4. Compare ***The Mystery and Melancholy of a Street*** by de Chirico and ***Composition*** by Miro

   A. Surrealsim, in some cases, attempts to portray a reality that is more real than the normal reality that we know. Which of these two paintings seem more real than the world as we ordinarily perceive it? Why do you think so?
   B. Which of these paintings seems most concerned with the interior realities of psychology and the dream state?
   C. How can you tell when a painter is alluding to the interior psychological world?
   D. Do these paintings establish the reality of interior human life? How?
   E. Since all experience is interior, is it possible that a surrealist painting is more "real" than a painting that portrays only an outward appearance of things? Why?

F. Which of these two paintings seems to have the clearest symbolic content? What is that content?

Writing Standards

Concert Reviews

The review is to be written on a word processor or typewriter, with complete sentences, correct spelling, and grammar as outlined below. One or two pages is sufficient length. The reviews are not be returned until the last day of class.

A paragraph describing each work or group of works. The student is to give his or her personal reactions to each piece. The music is to be described as well as possible, both in the student's own words and the terms presented in this course. This includes the

1. Performing medium - Is it a solo recital, a jazz band concert, etc. (also special instruments and soloists).
2. General form (symphony, concerto, dance forms, etc.).
3. Outstanding features of melody, rhythms, texture, style, etc.

Students are not permitted to copy from printed concert programs, music reviews, or record jackets since this might be a breach of copyright. They are encouraged to take a pad and pen so comments can be written down after movements or works. This helps them to remember the music.

Gallery Reviews

The reviews are to be written on a word processor or typewriter, with complete sentences, correct spelling, and grammar as outlined below. One or two pages is sufficient length. The reviews are not be returned until the last day of class. The following information is to be included in the gallery review:

1. The name and describe the student's favorite work or works in the gallery.
2. A description of the elements that make each of these favorite works distinctive or set apart from the other works in the gallery.
3. Student reactions to the art works - were they enlightened? - informed? - introduced to any new ideas? - what reactions ywere experienced?
4. An evaluation of gallery: setting, lighting, atmosphere, etc.
5. Does the student think the experience was worth his or her time or a waste of time? Why do they think so?

Theatre Reviews

Reviews are to be written on a word processor or typewriter, using complete sentences, correct spelling, and grammar as outlined below. One or two pages is sufficient length. Reviews are not be returned until the last day of class. The following information about the play(s) must be included:

1. Name of play.
2. Playwright (author).
3. Director.
4. What the student believes was the chief purpose of the play - to entertain, inform, convince, offer escape? Did the production fulfill what they believed to be its intended purpose? Why do they think so?
5. Who was (were) the main character(s)?
6. Describe the supporting role(s)?

7. Strengths of the acting: voice, gestures, freedom of movement--was the acting convincing or only "acting?"
8. Any weakness in the acting?
9. Strengths of the production - costuming, tempo, timing fast or slow paced, scenery, stage crew, or anything else, you would like to comment about.
10. Student reaction to the production: were they inspired? were they moved to feel any emotion?
11. Was the production worth his or her time in giving them any new insights toward life or the arts, OR...?

Homework

Homework must either be written neatly with a ball-point pen, or with a word processor or typewriter - the student's choice. This scoring sheet represents what your instructor will be looking for when he reads your homework questions. The maximum score is 15. Each major heading will be given a numerical rating as indicated below:

0 = VERY POOR 1 = POOR 2 = GOOD 3 = EXCELLENT

1. Are the questions answered?

   a. Does the student waffle?
   b. Are answers omitted?
   c. Are answers given to questions not asked?

2. Are questions answered in depth? (3 marks)

   a. Is all information taken into account?
   b. Do answers consist of more than one or two words?
   c. Do answers give evidence writer has read and understood material?

3. Are answers consistent with the knowledge/facts to be learned from the readings?

   a. Does the student give evidence of having thought about the readings in the text?
   b. Does the student give evidence of having thought about the homework questions?

4. Are answers credible?

   a. Are answers given in the student's own words or merely copied from the text?
   b. Are the answers clearly stated?
   c. Are the answers supported with evidence?

5. Is the writing clear and accurate?

   a. Are answers written in complete sentences?
   b. Is proper spelling, punctuation, and capitalization used?

Essays

All essays must be written on a word processor or typewriter. This scoring sheet represents what the instructor will be looking for when he reads the essay examination questions. The maximum score is 18. Each major heading will be given a numerical rating as indicated below:

0 = VERY POOR 1 = POOR 2 = GOOD 3 = EXCELLENT

1. Clarity - does the essay state the question-at-hand clearly?

   A. Is the question stated objectively?
   B. Are terms defined when necessary?

2. Relevance - Does the essay relate only to what is relevant to the question-at-hand?

3. Logic - does the writer use evidence, and sound inferences?

   A. Evidence

      1. Are credible sources used?
      2. Is the evidence relevant?

   B. Inferences

      1. Do conclusions follow from the reasons offered?
      2. Are reasons based on sufficient data?
      3. Do explanations account for the facts?
      4. Are judgments based on acceptable principles?

4. Coherence - does the writer use clear and consistent organization?

   A. Is it clear what conclusions the reasons support?
   B. Are different issues kept separate?
   C. Are transitions between different points clear?

5. Fairness - are all relevant positions fairly portrayed and evaluated?

   A. Are similar positions considered, explained, and evaluated?
   B. Do alternative positions need to be considered, explained, and evaluated?
   C. Do objections from other points of view need to be considered and responded to?
   D. Are the consequences of the particular position taken into account?

6. Is proper attention given to grammar, punctuation, and style?

   A. Are the principles of good grammar followed?
   B. Is punctuation usage correct?
   C. Is there effective use of imagery and examples?
   D. Is the language used appropriate for the audience?

Student Assessment

The teacher uses traditional means for assessing listening and viewing tests in addition to using the standards listed above for written work. The volume of written assignments makes it difficult for the instructor to give a careful reading of all materials handed in, so this means a scanning of reading assignments to look for salient information and problems. Students need to do the writing whether the instructor can read all of it or not.

Learning to think critically involves self-assessment. Students need to be able to know whether of not they are writing to the standards indicated above. They need to know whether or not they have mastered the essential content of the course. Consequently, emphasis is placed in the fine arts course on student self-assessment as well as teacher assessment. Students can self-assess in a variety of ways.

One method is to divide the class into groups of four. Each group receives from the instructor four essay, report, or homework papers from other students who are not in the group.

Each person in the group reads each paper, and then discusses with other group members how well they think the papers meet the stated standards.

Another method is for the instructor to read excerpts from student papers which have been selected randomly and to ask the entire class to evaluate the material through open discussion. Another variation is to divide the group into pairs and for partners to share papers for mutual evaluation.

Conclusion

The instructor identifies the essential content of the course which is to be mastered by the students. The instructor helps students to achieve mastery of the course content and to assess their own mastery of that material. The instructor establishes the standards for written work and helps students to learn how to apply the standards to their work.

Students are held responsible for learning the essential content of the course. The textbook and the instructor are resources to assist the student in that mastery. Music examples and slides of visual art are used the class and the instructor attempts to model the kind of analysis students are to make. Traditional lecturing does not play a large role in classroom strategy.

Grading is not done on a curve, so it is possible for all students in the class to receive an A grade. Attempts have been made to involve each student in the determination of his or her grade in collaboration with the instructor, but this has not been too successful up to the present. The procedure is too different from the way students have been used to having grades assigned. These efforts will continue in the future.